Young at Heart: How Healthy is Your Heart?

One in every four deaths in the United States is due to heart disease.[1] That's nearly 610,000 Americans each year.[1] Although these statistics are staggering, the good news is that many of the risk factors that contribute to heart disease are preventable and controllable if you're young at heart.[2]

Heart Age

Heart age is the calculated age of your heart after factoring in your risk factors for heart disease.[2] It often varies from your chronological age. In fact, on average, American adults have hearts seven years older than their actual age.[2] Advanced aging is due to a number of risk factors such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and smoking.[1] When you consider that nearly half of all Americans have at least one of these three risk factors, the concern for heart disease becomes very real.[1] Other conditions and lifestyle choices that increase the risk of heart disease include obesity, poor diet, physical inactivity, diabetes, and excessive alcohol use.[1,2] To determine your heart age, check out the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Heart Age Calculator.

Heart Attack

Coronary heart disease (CHD), which is sometimes called coronary artery disease, is a form of heart disease. CHD is the most common cause of a heart attack.[3] A heart attack occurs when there is not enough blood flow to the heart.[3] A high heart age and other risk factors can contribute to decreased blood flow which can ultimately result in damage to the heart muscle.[3]

Every 43 seconds, a person in the United States has a heart attack.[3] That amounts to nearly 735,000 Americans each year.[3] One in five heart attacks is silent, meaning that the person was not aware of the symptoms.[3] Know the five major signs of a heart attack[4]:

- Jaw, neck, or back pain
- Feeling weak, faint, or light-headed
- Chest pain or tightness
- Arm or shoulder pain or discomfort
- Shortness of breath

Other signs of a heart attack include fatigue and nausea or vomiting.[4] Women are more likely to have these other signs.[4] If you think you or someone else is having a heart attack, call 9-1-1

immediately.[4] Timely medical treatment can reduce damage to your heart and potentially save your life.[4]

Lifestyle Choices

Unfortunately, it's not unusual to see young adults and some service members engaging in behaviors that contribute to heart disease. According to the 2014 Fleet and Marine Corps Health Risk Assessment, 22 percent of Sailors and 29 percent of Marines indicated they were current smokers; 39 percent of Sailors and 38 percent of Marines reported frequent consumption of high fat foods; and 64 percent of Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard service members who completed the assessment were classified as overweight or obese based on self-reported criteria.[5]

Fortunately, it's never too late to change your behaviors. Heart health can be improved at any age by eating healthy, exercising regularly, quitting tobacco, reducing stress, limiting alcohol consumption, and managing your weight. Check out these Navy and Marine Corps Public Health Center's (NMCPHC) Health Promotion and Wellness (HPW) topics for more information and resources:

- Healthy Eating
- Active Living
- Tobacco Free Living
- Psychological and Emotional Well-being
- Preventing Drug Abuse and Excessive Alcohol Use
- Weight Management

For additional information on what you can do today to keep your heart young and healthy, visit NMCPHC's HPW Heart Health Toolbox and the American Heart Association.

References

[1] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Heart Disease Facts. http://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/facts.htm. Reviewed 10 August 2015. Accessed December 2015.
[2] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Heart Age. http://www.cdc.gov/vitalsigns/heartage/. Reviewed 1 September 2015. Accessed December 2015.
[3] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Heart Attack. http://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/heart_attack.htm. Reviewed 5 August 2015. Accessed December 2015.
[4] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Heart Attack Signs and Symptoms. http://www.cdc.gov/heartdisease/signs_symptoms.htm. Reviewed 5 August 2015. Accessed December 2015.
[5] Fleet and Marine Corps Health Risk Assessment 2014. Navy Marine Corps Public Health Center EpiData Center Department. http://www.med.navy.mil/sites/nmcphc/Documents/health-promotion-wellness/general-tools-and-programs/HRA-2014-report-final.pdf. Prepared May 2015. Accessed December 2015.